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Testimony
Before the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives
Hearing on the dispensation of funds from the
Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act

December 4, 2003

Representative Pombo
Representative Gibbons

Subject: Testimony for a hearing on the dispensation of funds from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this very important public land management legislation. I have chosen to live in and operate a business in Nevada for over 30 years. I have a Master of Science in geology from the Mackay School of Mines in Reno, and presently operate the second largest privately held mineral exploration firm in northern Nevada. I also serve on the Elko County Public Land Use Advisory Commission. I have been involved in public land issues all of my life.

Nevada has been severely impacted by a multitude of piecemeal land management legislative decisions over the last 150 years. Several of these actions in recent years, have addressed broadening the private land base in Southern Nevada, which has sustained the economic growth in that area for many years. The Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) offers a unique opportunity to address many public land management issues at one time, if we avoid the piecemeal approach of the past.

SNPLMA provides a method to convert public lands to the private land base within the state. This is working very well for Clark County, and Southern Nevada. Through this act, the private land and water base that is required for any economic growth engine, is being increased in Southern Nevada, while being decreased in the remainder of the state. This needs to be corrected in order to sustain the quality of life in all areas of the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. CONVERT EXISTING PUBLIC LANDS IN ALL AREAS OF THE STATE TO PRIVATE LANDS

Presently over 85% of Nevada is public lands, which restricts the economic activity. The Nevada Association of Counties (NACO) has a policy of no net loss of private land acreage in all of the counties in order to protect the tax base. SNPLMA should make provisions for disposal of public lands to private lands of equal acreage or value within any particular county where private land acquisitions are made.

There is no pressing need to increase the control the public lands by the federal agencies within the State of Nevada. These agencies are continually lacking funding to carry out their designated managerial roles. To increase their land holdings would only stretch the limited resources further.

2. ENCOURAGE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY BY PRIVITIZATION

All of the tremendous economic activity in the last 50 years in Nevada has been encouraged and made possible by the private land base. Warehousing, gaming, and mining are all dependent upon the availability of private lands. Private land and the availability of water are the driving forces for economic viability and

diversification.

An excellent example of cooperative land management legislation is the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and other legislation that has provided for designation of specific scenic and wildlife resources as well as designation of specific areas for economic development. The native people in Alaska were given the opportunity to use the resources they have on their lands to provide a more sustainable lifestyle. The varied legislation in Alaska since the early 1970's has proven to be a very workable vehicle to address the varied resources available. This format to apply the SNPLMA would be very beneficial.

3. RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The conversion of public lands to "recreational uses" at the same time, setting aside "multiple use" concepts for the land is a dangerous route to take. Several of the Legislative acts in the last 50 years have provided private lands for Southern Nevada, while protecting specific parcels for recreation in the Tahoe Basin. The designation of "recreation", or "environmentally sensitive" areas has in effect limited the public access to the lands for any use. The massive transfer of money to the Tahoe Basin has not led to a proportional increase in the availability of, and access to the public access to the lake.

This concept has been used to actually limit the access to specific areas. Recent legislation approved the increase of user fees for National recreational areas indicate the lack of funding for these facilities. These agencies are continually limited by funding restrictions, and the lack of updating of the recreational facilities they are to serve. More private land based recreation is a good alternative, and the use of SNPLMA to enhance the recreational opportunities would be a great alternative.

We all need to look at using SNPLMA for a Win-Win solution to challenging land use issues in the next few years. Please do not let it continue to benefit only one small portion of the state, while expropriating the economic resources of other portions of the state.

Respectfully submitted,

Donald J. Decker